

## ***John Moore (Ed) I am Not a Man I am Dynamite: Friedrich Nietzsche and the Anarchist Tradition***

***Brian Morris*** deplores John Moore and friends' views on Nietzsche and anarchism.

This interesting collection of essays, mostly by male academic philosophers, is largely an attempt to convince us that the reactionary philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche was actually a true anarchist – pure, creative, life affirming, elitist. By contrast, those awful nineteenth century anarchists such as Bakunin and Kropotkin, in criticizing and challenging state power, economic exploitation under capitalism and all forms of social oppression, were not real anarchists, for they were motivated only by envy, weakness and *ressentiment* and were lacking in any creative impulse. These academics have their understanding back-to-front, of course.

The collection is edited by the late John Moore, who is described in the introduction as an eccentric ‘iconoclastic’ thinker – even though Moore joyfully embraced every intellectual fad around, from primitivism and spiritualism to Nietzschean aristocratic individualism, and never lost an opportunity to denigrate reason, socialism and class-struggle anarchism. Moore also repudiated the Enlightenment – unlike his guru Nietzsche – and arrogantly described Kropotkin as “obsolete”, ignorant of the fact that Kropotkin had critiqued ‘modernity’ even before Nietzsche. Apparently Moore did not advocate the revolutionary transformation of the capitalist order and the creative development of other forms of social life based on mutual aid and voluntary co-operation. Instead he advocated ‘insurrection’ by cultural aesthetes. This starry-eyed follower of Nietzsche seems oblivious to the fact that the ‘hermit of Sils-Maria’ (as Nietzsche described himself) feared, hated, resented and repudiated all forms of insurrection, especially on the part of the lower classes – or the ‘rabble’, as he contemptuously described ordinary working people. Moore’s linear ‘two-stage’ conception of anarchist history is equally simplistic and quite fallacious.

Within the collection there are some thoughtful essays exploring the links between Nietzsche and the anarchist tradition, although the esoteric philosopher Ananda

Coomaraswamy is certainly no anarchist, being an ardent supporter of the caste system – his ‘anti-politics’ being related to the benefit of the Brahman caste! There are also essays on the theory of ‘chaos’, an advocacy of which is said to be shared by both Nietzsche and anarchists – as you know, anarchists have long been ignorantly criticized for being apostles of disorder and chaos instead of being honestly characterised as standing for intelligent autonomy. This is as well as chaos being a characteristic of the world. The world, we are told, is anarchistic! These detached academics do not appear to have heard of complexity theory, which was actually expressed in embryonic form by anarchists like Kropotkin at the end of the nineteenth century.

There are essays also on such topics as nihilism, religion, and the ‘death of God’. Unfortunately these essays consist largely of scholastic jargon and theological blather, with ample reference to the esoteric writings of Deleuze and Heidegger. I’m afraid they left me cold, and conveyed precious little about Nietzsche or anarchism that I did not already know.

The essay that represents the main thrust of this collection is by Max Cafard. In a previous life he was known as John Clark and was the author of a sterling critique of Max Stirner as well as being a keen promoter of Murray Bookchin’s social ecology. Cafard has now, it seems, adopted liberal politics, advocating bioregional representative government with coercive legal powers and a market economy, as well as whole-heartedly embracing Nietzschean aristocratic individualism. What is surprising and quite deplorable about Cafard’s essay (apart from his critique of postmodernism) is that he not only applauds the farrago of nonsense and misunderstandings that Nietzsche expressed towards anarchism, but applies this same crude psychologistic analysis to contemporary anarchism too. Venting his spleen on Murray Bookchin in particular, as well as scores of other unnamed leftists, class struggle anarchists and anti-capitalists, this liberal professor informs us that all opposition to the state, capitalism and other forms of social oppression is purely motivated by ‘ressentiment’! Thus contemporary anarchists are dismissed by Cafard as power-hungry dogmatists, fanatics, sectarians, nihilists – as violent and rigid personalities who not only have a contempt for people but are quite unable to love other beings or the Earth. Cafard’s long essay is simply a banal regurgitation of Nietzsche’s own dim critique of anarchism – full of venom, malice, slander, misunderstandings and resentment itself. Enough said.

With a few exceptions the collection of essays in *I am Not a Man I am Dynamite* take a rather sycophantic and uncritical attitude towards Nietzsche, hardly challenging Nietzsche's confused understanding of socialism and anarchism. They also completely fail to engage with the concept of 'aristocracy', which is a key notion and ideal for Nietzsche; and furthermore they interpret the philosopher's 'will to power' as a purely a psychological category, involving creative agency. In fact, for Nietzsche the will to power also involved social relationships of power, in terms of exploitation, domination, suppression, command, overpowering the weak, mastery, and of course, war – all of which Nietzsche approved of and affirmed.

There is undoubtedly a libertarian aspect to Nietzsche's philosophy: his solitary form of individualism, with its aesthetic appeal to self-making so alluring to cultural aesthetes; the radical critique implied in his "revaluation of all values"; his strident attack on the state in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*; and his impassioned celebration of the life instincts, personal freedom and power. But was Nietzsche really the 'good anarchist' as Cafard describes him? Hardly. For the radicalism of his aristocratic individualism is more than off-set by his thoroughly reactionary mindset. The "revaluation of all values" did not for Nietzsche extend to challenging aristocratic values, hierarchy, the class structure or economic forms of exploitation – and anyone who did so was vehemently denounced by Nietzsche as a dolt or a blockhead, or as poisonous. Though he opposed tyranny and oligarchy, it is clear that socio-economic power for Nietzsche should serve and protect the strong, the noble, the aristocracy. Under no circumstances should power benefit the weak, the lower classes, the slaves or the rabble, let alone usurp the aristocratic order. Nietzsche heaps praise upon the caste system and its ranked hierarchy; he clearly admired dictators like Julius Caesar and Napoleon; and he even played around with the idea not simply of improving the human race, but of eradicating the weak – by poisoning their wells! Or was he simply being ironic? Nietzsche's misogyny is well known, and he often described women as chattel or property. Reciprocity, mutual aid, and equal rights for all were all poisonous doctrines to Nietzsche, for what he valued was a "good and healthy aristocracy" (his words). Dionysian philosophers, Nietzsche implies, should be the commanders and legislators in the aristocratic order he envisaged. As a sympathetic biographer put it: Nietzsche always identified with the nobility, and advocated "a social system in which a small number of select human beings dominates the rest and employs them as slaves" (Hollingdale 1972). Hardly the kind of society that anarchists envisage – one based on

mutual aid and co-operation and voluntary associations: a free communism, a politics of community and of difference, to stick current labels on these ideas.

Contributors to this collection may express their admiration and enthusiasm for Nietzsche and his concept of the *übermensch*, but give me Kropotkin, Malatesta and Rocker any day. For all their limitations you at least know which side of the fence they stand on: on the side of the oppressed, creatively engaged in developing alternative modes of social life – unlike Nietzscheans, who are intent only on promoting a parasitic cultural elite.

Brian Morris, 2006